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Brazil: Human Rights Situation

- Brazil

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Mrs. Mink.  
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Brazil has consistently rejected the premise that the protection of human rights is a matter of international concern. It has opposed an activist role for the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and its UN counterpart.

Publication of the 1977 human rights report and the initial delay in cabinet level consultations were seen as further evidence of US hostility. Brazil responded by refusing all military assistance tied to human rights and denouncing five longstanding bilateral military agreements (which elements in the armed forces considered outmoded in any event). This terminated the structure for bilateral military cooperation and symbolized the decline in our overall relationship.

More recently, the tone of our overall relationship has improved, partly as a result of Mrs. Carter's trip and my consultations in November under the 1976 Memorandum of Understanding. Brazil nonetheless remains suspicious of our basic intentions and determined to pursue its national agenda. The President's decision to visit Brazil creates a psychological climate for movement on basic issues, although progress is likely to be, at best, painfully slow.

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U.S. Objectives: To soften Brazil's obstructionist approach to the IAHR. To encourage Brazil to expand improvements in the area of security of the person and to implement the reputedly planned political liberalization.

Brazil's Objectives: To convince us that human rights are an internal matter, and that external pressures only complicate its internal situation and harm our relations.

Essential Factors: Since Geisel came into office in 1974, Brazil's overall human rights situation has improved but problems remain. Though the Brazilian Government gave a clear priority to economic growth over socio-economic development in the past, there are some indications that it may be reordering its priorities. Repressive measures, reportedly including torture, were used against student demonstrators in mid-1977. Geisel has rebuked officials responsible for mistreatment and exerted stricter controls. Benchmarks for further improvement would be restoration of habeas corpus and civil judiciary review in national security cases.

Future human rights conditions are closely linked to the fate of the broader liberalization process reportedly in the planning stage. The current vigorous political debate has been widely reported in Brazil's relatively free press and recently as well in the more closely controlled electronic media.

The GOB's concern over US interference on human rights is such that it pressured Paraguay not to accept a visit by the IAHR (although it supported increased OAS funding for the IAHR).

Points to be Made:

-- Geisel's recent Mexico speech emphasized his

Government's human rights priority of meeting the basic human needs of the poor. This is a challenging goal. What are his plans?

- We applaud President Geisel's actions to curb human rights abuse but were disturbed by isolated reports of abuse on students last year. The steps to restore press freedoms are important and hopefully will be continued. What are the chances of restoring habeas corpus and civil judicial review in national security cases and for a full political amnesty including exiles.
- We are encouraged by Geisel's moves toward political liberalization, and hope they can be sustained in the future to achieve a return to democratic institutions.
- We hope Brazil will support the IAHRRC as a means of strengthening international cooperation to promote human rights.